

# LOS ANGELES HERALD

EXAMINER

Monday  
May 5, 1986

## Encouraging Mideast cooperation through scientific research

By Henry A. Waxman

**S**igns of a reconciliation between Egypt and Israel have never been weaker since Camp David. There is no trade between these nations, little tourism, and no Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv. Today, even a 600-yard strip of land at the Red Sea port of Taba creates a diplomatic impasse.

Not far below this discouraging surface, however, is tangible evidence that peaceful cooperation not only can exist, but does. Ironically, however, the U.S. program that sponsors it is now threatened by our own actions.

Few efforts in U.S. foreign aid

Rep. Henry A. Waxman, D-Los Angeles, is the original sponsor of the Middle East Regional Cooperation Program.

have worked as well as the Mideast Regional Cooperation Program, which funds joint research by Egyptian and Israeli scientists into problems facing both countries.

While using only 0.1 percent of annual U.S. aid to Egypt and Israel, this program has succeeded beyond all of our hopes. Each one of its major projects — in aquaculture, infectious diseases and dry land agriculture — have produced breakthroughs.

Working together, scientists from Israel and Egypt have, for example, cross-bred fish from their two countries to produce a high-protein specimen that grows to market size faster than before. Medical researchers working together quelled an outbreak of the deadly, mosquito-borne, Rift Valley Fever, which in 1982 killed several thousand people and 3 million head of livestock. They have now completely driven it from the region.

Clearly, scientific cooperation has yielded tangible gains. But these advances are not what is most striking about this program. Most importantly, Egyptians and Israelis — blood enemies for 30 years after the founding of the state of Israel — have accomplished these things together.

They have chosen areas to cooperate where the needs and abilities of the two countries coincide, to ensure that all projects entail an equal partnership. The result is that about 1,000 scientists from both nations have directly benefitted from each other's work.

Countless personal relationships of trust and respect now span the Sinai Desert. We hope that these bonds, as they grow deeper and more numerous, will help change the way the nations interact with each other.

In order to wage effective war, each side must dehumanize the

other. In the same way, lasting peace requires a process of humanization and understanding of how much their humanity — their essential problems, desires and dreams — are shared. The collaboration made possible by our aid demonstrates exactly that, to the participants and to the whole world. Cooperative research highlights that common humanity for all to see.

This gives such aid large advantages over traditional military aid. Clearly, it does not eliminate the need for weapons. Weapons are a form of insurance against the worst case — the outbreak of hostilities. But aid for cooperation helps build a better case. By building familiarity, it gives each side more confidence in its estimation of the others, lessening the need to guard against the unknown.

The impact of such aid is not only more deep seated, but longer

lasting. The attitudes it influences are passed down through generations. Security in armaments, by contrast, lasts only until their hardware is outmoded.

The road this program has traveled so far has not been easy. All along, participants have had to contend with skepticism and even open opposition to it in their own countries. Israelis and Egyptians agree that the only country they both trust to guide them is the United States.

This week will see an unprecedented milestone on that road when Egyptians, Israelis and Americans working on all the major U.S.-sponsored projects meet in Washington. Their purpose will be to jointly assess what has been done so far and set in agenda for the future.

Even while they meet, however, that future is weakened not by Egypt or Israel, but by the United

States. A combination of congressional and State Department decisions has cut regional cooperation program by almost 50 percent this year. That means the continuity of ongoing projects, so vital to scientific research, is threatened. It also means new projects, like one that planned to study ways to fight fetal malnutrition, will have to be shelved.

These cuts are bad policy. They imperil the only cooperative work in the whole U.S. aid program, work which costs a tiny fraction of what we give the two countries in bilateral aid.

And it comes at a critical time for Mideast peace. Several moderate Arab states expressed interest in joining the regional cooperation program quietly and unofficially. Now is the time to encourage the progressive elements of the two sides, not undermine them. ■